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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the various funding sources used by programs which serve and support youth and young adults with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities (EBD) as they transition into adulthood. Initial data from a survey of 18 program sites in Florida that are serving this target population resulted in the identification of more than 40 discrete funding sources, including: (1) five federal programs which may each have several components under which funding might be obtained; (2) six state categorical systems that directly or indirectly support services for portions of this population; and (3) dozens of local sources which can be organized into almost a dozen types of fund sources. No more than 6 of the 18 surveyed agencies make use of any one of the named fund sources, with most fund sources used by only two or three agencies. This distribution amplifies the point that every agency and community utilizes different resources to meet the needs of the young people in this transition-aged population. The most commonly employed source is private funds, such as those obtained through charitable giving or from private businesses that choose to support efforts on behalf of this population. (CR)

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Filling in the Gaps: Funding Services to Support Youth and Young Adults as They Transition into Adulthood

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify the various funding sources used by programs which serve and support youth and young adults with emotional and/or behavioral difficulties (EBD) as they transition into adulthood. Funding mechanisms for this population are limited due to the difficulty in serving a population that does not fit neatly into any current service category. By conducting this study we anticipate being able to acquaint other practitioners, advocates, administrators, and policymakers with the types of funding mechanisms that transition programs are tapping for various types of services and supports, thereby setting the occasion for these program personnel to explore similar means of more adequately serving their transition-aged young people.

Methods

This study is being accomplished by surveying program personnel at sites in Florida and nationally who are serving this target population. The telephone interview survey instrument provides for a semi-structured, open-ended interview which is designed to learn: (a) the range of services and supports that are typically used in serving the needs of these young people; and (b) what funding mechanisms are being used to secure these supports and services across the transition domains of employment, educational opportunities, living situation, and community life adjustment. The results presented here are preliminary in that they are based on the first 18 sites on which partial or complete surveys have been conducted.

This research is funded in part by a Transition to Independence Process (TIP) grant (#291-26290-90654) awarded to the University of South Florida by the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Services and Community Support. The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the Florida Department of Education. Those seeking more information about this project should contact Nicole Deschenes at the address above.

The results from this study are being prepared for inclusion in a web site and for a chapter by Cliff Davis, et al, which will appear in H. B. Clark and M. Davis, Eds., (2000, April). *Transition to adulthood: A resource for assisting young people with emotional or behavioral difficulties.* Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brooks, Company.

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Results

The first eighteen agencies surveyed identified more than 40 discrete funding sources, including:

(a) five federal programs (e.g., Medicaid, Joint Training and Partnership Act) which may each have several components under which funding might be obtained (e.g., three programs from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development – McKinney Homeless Grants, Community Development Grants, and "Youth on the Streets" Grants);

(b) six state categorical systems (i.e., child and adult mental health, child protection, health, juvenile justice, education) that directly or indirectly support services for portions of this population; and

(c) dozens of local sources (e.g., community charitable organizations, foundations, county-determined grant and allocation programs, local college funds) which can be organized into almost a dozen types of fund sources. At all levels, multiple funding sources and mechanisms were identified.

No more than 6 of the 18 surveyed agencies make use of any one of the named fund sources, with most fund sources used by only two or three agencies. This distribution amplifies the point that every agency and community utilizes different resources to meet the needs of the young people in this transition-aged population. The most commonly employed source is private funds, such as those obtained through charitable giving (e.g., United Way) or from private businesses that choose to support efforts on behalf of this population. This is a critical survey finding because it underscores two facts: 1) the major public funding sources are virtually blind to this population, and 2) communities and agencies trying to serve the population rely first on highly variable private sources to fill that void. The results of the entire survey will be available in detail by Summer 2000 at the following website: www.fmhi.usf.edu/cfs/policy/tip/tiphp.htm.

Discussion

For the population of young people with mental health needs and all those who care about those individuals, there is good news and bad news in the survey results. On one hand, the survey shows that an agency or group of agencies with a commitment to serving youth and young adults with emotional or behavioral difficulties can find ways to at least partially fund some level of services and/or supports. Each agency employs a different combination of funding sources, drawing from among a host of funds with some flexibility to support the wide range of needs of this population. Each agency offers a different combination of services and supports, uniquely tailored to the needs of their clientele and community and to the resources available.

On the other hand, the set of survey responses describes no obvious, single source or pathway for other agencies and communities interested in establishing such services and supports. Services explicitly responsive to the unique needs of these young persons have no single or primary fund source, and most of the surveyed agencies manage a unique, changing portfolio or patchwork of funds with numerous and complex eligibility requirements related to age, type of need, severity, income, and/or educational status.

Those agencies and communities now offering transition services and supports are the pioneers blazing a trail to be followed and improved upon in the future. As more communities respond to the needs of this population, funding mechanisms can be expected to shift and evolve to become more like other fund streams used to meet the needs of persons with emotional or behavioral difficulties. However, this will occur only through well orchestrated and persistent advocacy efforts on the part of parents, young people, program personnel, researchers, and administrators.